

Whiskey and Broken Hearts by finnxwheeler

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Summary:

Takes place about nine years or so after the events of Stranger Things. Mike & Will are adults, in college, and living in their own apartment together. But when Mike cheats on Will, things get really ugly, really quickly.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

Part 2 coming soon!

Also, please keep in mind that this is older! Byeler (Mike & Will).

This work contains the following triggers: Cheating and mentions of drinking/alcohol use.

Will couldn't stop pacing.

His mind had been turning all night long, and he hadn't even gotten a chance to sleep yet. His fiancé, Mike, hadn't come home the previous night, which was high unusual for him. Mike always called if he was going to be gone for a while or out late, and even that was rare. Mike always came home on time or close to it, and he rarely stayed out late anymore unless he was with Will. Regardless, he always came back to their apartment and back to Will.

But it was currently ten in the morning, and Will hadn't heard from Mike in over twelve hours. What if he'd gotten hurt? What if he was drunk somewhere? What if he got in his car while drunk and had gotten in an accident? That last thought prompted Will to call local hospitals, but Mike hadn't been admitted to any of them. Will's anxiety spiked even worse then; where in the hell was he?

Two more hours passed, and Will's anxiety only worsened. He called everyone that he could think of, asking if Mike was with them. He wasn't with any friends and he hadn't been in contact with them, either. Noon came and the sound of the front door being unlocked snapped Will out of his hazy paranoia. He stared at the closed door with wide eyes, swallowing hard as he prepared to either scold Mike, burst into tears, yell at him, leap into his arms, or maybe even a combination of two or more of those things. When the door opened and Mike walked in, Will found himself grinning and laughing in relief. But one better look at Mike caused Will to shut up almost immediately.

Mike wasn't even looking at Will, which was unusual in and of itself. Usually he was picking Will up, kissing him and spinning him around as Will giggled. He would also apologize profusely while smothering Will's face in kisses, vowing to never make him worry like that again. But now, Mike was shuffling into the apartment with his eyes downcast, the door slowly closing as Mike bumped it with his foot. His thick, dark, shaggy hair was a mess and his overall demeanor was very concerning to Will. His body was just rigid, but his shoulders were slumped and his head was bowed, not even glancing up at his own worried fiancé.

Something was wrong here. Will could feel it.

As Will got a better look at Mike, he could see other aspects that were definitely off. For one, his sweater was on backward. For another, his zipper was undone. Finally, there were a few dark marks littering his neck, and Will instantly knew what those were. Will thought that maybe most of those were coincidental with Mike's potential hangover, but it just seemed highly unlikely. His heart and stomach absolutely fell at the sight before him. Will begged—mentally begged—that it wasn't what he thought it was. If God was real, Will prayed that He would show him some mercy and allow all of this to be some kind of joke or at least a horrible nightmare that he would wake from any minute with Mike next to him and offering his comfort.

"Will," Mike choked out, teary eyes finally flickering up to look at Will. "We need to talk."

Will's legs felt as if they were tied with bricks as he walked to the couch, following Mike's lead as the taller man took a seat. Will wasn't looking at Mike now, and Will could feel Mike taking one of his hands. Will slowly glanced at his fiancé, feeling as though he had been punched in the stomach upon seeing the expression on Mike's face. He looked pained, and his falling tears all but gave away Will's worst fear.

"Will," Mike said again. "I love you—"

"Spit it out, Mike," Will interrupted, his voice conveying the anxiety he was feeling. "Where were you? I was up all night worrying about

you, you know.”

Mike drew a shaky breath, wincing and reaching for his head. He ran a nervous hand through his messed hair, bending forward on the couch and folding his hands together. He was silent for a few minutes, then said: “I went to Eric’s party last night. Remember him? Tall, funny, cute guy that was in my history class freshman year at the college?”

“Yeah,” Will stated. “You told me this already, last night before you left. We were gonna go together, remember? Until I said that I didn’t feel well and you were going without me. So, none of this answers my question: Where. Were. You? Where in the hell did you go where you couldn’t pick up a damn phone and let me know you were okay, at least?”

Mike wiped his eyes, sniffing as he looked at Will. “I had a good bit to drink,” Mike said softly, his voice beginning to crack slightly. “I was drunk and I started chatting with this guy named Justin. He lived in the frat house where the party was being held, and we talked most of the night. We were both wasted and—“

“And what, Mike?” Will asked forcefully, his jaw clenching a bit. “Huh?!”

“We went up to his room where it was quiet,” Mike continued, his eyes falling back to the floor. “We talked some more. He started moving closer and before I knew it...We were kissing. Kissing led to a little more, and I...I woke up in his bed this morning. We were both so...so drunk and I...Will. I am so sorry, baby.”

Will could feel his heart absolutely shattering, to the point where it felt as if it may stop. As Mike spoke, Will felt himself grow steadily sicker to his stomach. Now that the words were hanging between them out in the open, he felt as if he may actually throw up. The world felt like it was going to stop turning and in a way, Will’s actually had. For a moment, Will wondered if he’d misheard what Mike had said. The look on Mike’s face and the tears streaming down his freckled cheeks told him that he hadn’t, however. It wasn’t a dream; this was really happening.

“Will,” Mike said tearfully. “I’m s-so sorry. I...”

“You...You cheated on me,” Will said, his voice a barely audible whisper. He could hardly believe he was even SAYING those words, and they sounded foreign to his own ears. “You...You...cheated on...ch-cheated on m-me.”

Mike reached for Will’s hand, only for Will to swat it away. “I’m sorry. Will—“

“Don’t,” Will hissed as Mike put an arm around his shoulders. “Stop it.”

“Will—“

“I said, don’t!”

Will jerked out of Mike’s grip, standing from the couch on wobbly knees. He ran his hands through his hair, trying to contain his anger and being unable. Will was fairly certain that his boiling rage was the only thing keeping him from breaking down completely. His soft brown eyes were blazing as he rounded on Mike, his hands balling in fists by his sides as his shoulders began hunching upward.

“How dare you?!” Will cried. “How dare you show back up here after what you did?! You should have stayed gone, Mike. You SHOULD HAVE STAYED GONE!”

“Will—“ Mike attempted again.

“You have the audacity to walk in here and try to make up with me,” Will panted, “after you...I can’t even say it!”

“It was a mistake!” Mike yelled, getting to his feet at once. “Will. I would never—“

“YOU DID!” Will roared. “You didn’t just trip and fall and land on his lips, did you? NO! Drunk or not, YOU STILL DID IT AND IT STILL HAPPENED! What, is getting drunk supposed to excuse what you did?! Is it supposed to make me forgive you?!”

“No!” Mike exclaimed. “It was just a bad lapse in judgement! It never

should have happened, and I feel terrible that it did! Please, Will. You have to believe me! I know that you know me better than that. You know I would never do that to you if I were in my right mind!"

Will tugged at his own hair, beginning to pace around the living room again. This time, however, his energy was angry rather than nervous. He couldn't even look at Mike, so many insults and terrible thoughts running through his mind that he wanted to just throw at his fiancé. He tried to get hold of himself and to control what he was saying, but to no avail.

"I should've known this would happen," Will said unsteadily. "I was never enough for you. You, Mr. Big Shot Biologist. You, Mr. Tall, Dark, and Handsome. You know what you are, Mike? You are nothing but an asshole who is good for nothing but trouble and heartbreak. You're disgusting, you know that? I'm surprised that this didn't happen sooner, but hey. Maybe this isn't the first time, how in the hell should I know?"

Mike sat back down on the couch in stunned silence. Will's words had pierced him to the core, and he had to fight back a fresh wave of emotion as he looked up at his fiancé—the man who was supposed to love him, yet was saying all of these awful things right to his face. "How...Will—"

"How could you DO THIS TO ME?!" Will screamed, tears beginning to trail down his own delicate cheeks. "I thought you loved me! We're engaged, for Christ sake! What in the hell, Mike?! Why?! What did HE have that I don't?!"

Mike's eyes found Will then, shaking his head as more tears slipped down his already-wet cheeks. "No! I do love you, Will. You are my everything. Do you hear me? He's nothing. Just a huge mistake that I made and that I am taking responsibility for! Isn't that enough for you?!"

Will laughed, but it lacked any trace of humor. "Are you kidding me right now?!" Will asked, his eyes wide with angry disbelief. "You taking responsibility doesn't erase the fact that it happened, you douchebag! And look at your damn neck! There's another big reminder glaring me right in the damn face over the fact that YOU

BETRAYED ME!"

"You are being such a drama queen!" Mike cried, his anger suddenly getting the better of him. Yelling caused his splitting headache to hurt even worse, but he just didn't care. "Jesus Christ, Will! I wouldn't hold it against you if you made a drunken mistake like this! Why? Because I know it didn't mean anything! You'd never cheat on me while sober! I know you love me and I love you, too! That hasn't changed, no matter what! Will, come on! Stop being such a baby over this! Maybe it wouldn't have even happened at all if you would have just gone with me like you promised! Ever think of that?!"

Will just blinked at Mike, his brows furrowed and jaw slack. "WH-WHAT?!" Will roared. "Are you—Are you seriously blaming me for your screw-up?! Are you saying that I'm not right to be angry for what you did? That everything would be fine if I went somewhere that I didn't wanna go?!" He paused, laughing humorlessly again before spitting in Mike's face. "Go to hell, Mike."

Mike flinched when Will spat at him, wiping it away with a whimper. "I'm sorry. What I just said, that...that wasn't cool."

"No, it wasn't 'cool,'" Will said, air-quoting the last word before wiping a few tears from his own eyes. "I'm leaving, Mike. I'm going to pack my bags and I'm going to go back to Hawkins for a few days."

"No!" Mike sobbed, moving toward Will again. He could feel his own legs threatening to give out, but he didn't care at this point. He had to reach out to Will and make it right. His guilt was eating him alive, and he wanted nothing more than to beat himself up over the entire situation. That would come later, though. "Will, no. Don't. Baby—"

"Don't call me that!" Will cried out. "Don't call me 'baby,' 'babe,' 'Willie,' or whatever else! I'm done. You broke my heart and I can't —"

Will cut off then, bursting into a series of wracking sobs. His weeps were soft and low, then gradually became louder and more wounded. Mike took a cautious step toward him for an embrace, but Will roughly shoved him away.

“DON’T TOUCH ME!” Will screamed, his voice high and emotional. “Those hands...They were on someone else last night and I—“

Will gagged, rushing to their bedroom bathroom to vomit. Mike just started punching one of the couch cushions repeatedly and aggressively, in an attempt to release some of his own self-loathing. It didn’t work; in fact, it made everything feel worse somehow. He heard the toilet flush after a couple of minutes, then Will’s footsteps began moving toward their bedroom closet. Mike walked in, seeing two large suitcases on the bed and Will sadly shoving clothes inside. He pulled one of Mike’s shirts from Will’s side of the closet—Mike’s old swim team shirt, as a matter of fact, Will’s favorite—holding it up to his face and sobbing into it. He inhaled Mike’s leftover scent of cologne and just Mike, stroking the fabric delicately before giving it a toss to the floor with a disgruntled cry. Will continued throwing clothes and various items into the suitcases, ignoring Mike all the while. He grabbed the packed cases once he was finished, and they appeared to be as big as Will was—and probably almost as heavy.

“Let me help, at least,” Mike offered.

“You’ve done enough,” Will growled. “Screw off.”

“Will, stop!” Mike exclaimed. “Just, please! You don’t have to leave. / I’ll/ leave, you stay. You...You’re not in a fit state to drive right now.”

“Oh, so now you’re worried?” Will asked incredulously. “Get away from me.”

“No, I—“ Mike said, moving toward the front door to block Will’s exit. “I can’t let you go. I can’t!”

“MOVE!” Will thundered, his face red and his eyes absolutely flaming with fury and so much hurt that Mike could feel himself wanting to die.

Reluctantly, Mike moved from the door, weeping as the love of his life grabbed the doorknob and opened the door. Mike’s entire world was about to walk out that door, all because of his huge screw up. He ruined his relationship with Will, and all it took was one drunken

night with a frat boy.

Mike had one more shred of hope as Will hesitated in the open doorway, but it was short-lived. He could see Will removing the engagement ring from his ring finger, throwing it in Mike's face before walking out with a slam of the door. Mike picked the ring up from the floor, sitting there in its place as he buried his aching head in his hands.

There was nothing left to do now but pick up the pieces of his broken heart and attempt to mend it. He had to do that with or without Will; he had to accept what he did, let the guilt consume him, and move on with his life in the best way possible. No matter how hard it was going to be.

But still, he was determined to make this right. He was determined to do everything he could to try and get Will back.

2. Chapter 2

Fifteen months had gone by in the blink of an eye.

Will Byers had been doing fairly well in life for the past year. He'd graduated college magna cum laude after transference to another university, gotten a great job at a local youth health center, and had found love again in a medical resident named Isaac. He and Isaac had moved out of their apartment and into their own house a few months ago, and Will couldn't have been happier with his new life. He had everything he'd ever wished for, and so much more.

But there was still something missing.

Since Isaac had started practicing medicine at the local hospital, Will was left alone quite frequently. This left him a lot of time to think, and his thoughts mostly consisted of the usual adult fun—taxes, bills, work. However, he often found himself thinking about someone on a daily basis, and it was a person that he really shouldn't have been thinking about at all.

Will hadn't seen Mike Wheeler since he moved the rest of the things out of their apartment one chilly afternoon last September. Will had transferred to a new school so that he wouldn't have to risk bumping into Mike on campus, and had stayed in a hotel downtown until the transfer was a done deal. Will had ignored all of Mike's attempts at contact: He hung up on his phone calls, threw his letters in a box, unopened, and changed the subject when their mutual friends brought up Mike or tried to pass on a message from him. Will's pain ran deeper than anyone fully realized, and he just couldn't look past the fact that this man, who claimed to love him, had slept with someone else.

After all, cheating was a choice and not a mistake. Drunk or not, Mike could have refused and he didn't. That's what had hurt Will the most.

Will had started drinking a bit more after their split. But then he met Isaac two months later, and everything just started making sense again. Will had fallen in love fairly quickly, but Mike still lingered in

the back of his mind at all times. Sometimes, when he would look at Isaac, he'd see Mike instead. Will would hear Mike's voice or his laughter when he was with Isaac, and it would spark a fresh wave of sadness deep inside of him. Will found himself wondering if Mike had also found someone new, if he'd graduated college, or if he'd moved out of their old apartment. Will would have asked one of their mutual friends, but Will had made a pact with them: They wouldn't talk about Mike, they wouldn't pass on any more messages from Mike, and they wouldn't answer any of Will's questions about Mike, if he asked any.

Going a year without any information had been pure Hell, to say the least.

Will would always remember what Mike had done—that he had cheated, for the love of God—but it didn't stop him from thinking about his former lover. Despite all of the bad things, there were still far better things that had happened between them. It was only a one time occurrence, and maybe it truly WAS a mistake. Will's thoughts about it always changed like the weather, but no matter which way his mind swayed on any given day, Will always missed Mike. Will always imagined Mike's eyes and how gorgeous they were, how his hair was always a mess, even when it was brushed, how his smile could make flowers grow in the middle of January, and how beautiful & adorable he looked when Will woke up next to him every morning.

Will's heart would swell and, in the early days of their split, Will would cry every time he thought about any and all aspects of Mike Wheeler. Will would sometimes wake in the middle of the night, sweating and terrified from his nightmares, reaching for Mike and finding Isaac instead. There was something in Mike's comfort, in his arms, that Isaac just didn't have. Will had wanted so badly to see Mike again, and often battled with his conscience over whether or not that would be the best idea.

Will didn't want to revisit that part of his life, but he knew that he had to in order to finally get over Mike. Will wanted to see if Mike was still living in their old building in the same apartment—4B, Will remembered. Will knew that it was a horrible idea to investigate, but how else would he finally get proper closure? If Mike no longer lived there, then maybe the new tenant would know where he had gone. If

Mike did still live there, then Will only intended to catch up and then get the hell out of there as fast as possible, if necessary.

But who was Will kidding? He was still in love with the bastard, and he so desperately wanted him back. Will also had a small feeling, in the pit of his stomach, that Mike possibly felt the same way. What could go wrong?

As it turned out, a lot.

One morning, Will told Isaac that he was taking a day trip to the city to visit old friends. He also stated that he didn't want Isaac to worry if he didn't return until the next day, just in case they wanted Will to stay over. It pained Will to lie, but he just didn't know how seeing Mike would go or where it could lead, and he didn't want Isaac to be alarmed if he didn't come home that night. Isaac had kissed him goodbye, told him to be careful, and begged him to have some much-needed fun. Will could feel the guilt over lying beginning to consume him, but Isaac didn't even know that Mike had existed. It was just a chapter in Will's life that he never opened to his new beau, and didn't see much of a point in it, anyway. Why tell your current partner about your ex-fiancé, who drunkenly cheated on you and tore your heart to shreds? It just wasn't necessary, in Will's opinion, and he didn't want Isaac to feel insecure or uneasy about any of his past relationships—particularly Mike.

The drive to the city that day seemed to take forever, even though it was only about half an hour away. Will's mind was racing a million times a minute, and he very nearly got into an accident a few times. He just couldn't stop thinking about every possible scenario with Mike: He had moved out, he'd gotten a new significant other, he'd be angry at Will for leaving and slam the door in his face, or he would be happy to see Will and would take him back. If the last one happened—in a perfect world, Will told himself—then what about Isaac? Either way, someone was getting their heart broken out of this, and Will wasn't prepared for that at all.

Will almost turned the car around and went home on more than one occasion; it was just too much for him to handle. He had no backup plan, nor had any idea what he would do if things turned ugly. He didn't even know what he was going to say to Mike—his best friend since pre-school, the first boy he fell in love with, his first everything, his soulmate.

What in the hell did you say to the man you walked out on after he confessed to cheating on you? What did you say after you ignored all contact from him for over a year, then suddenly show up on his doorstep with no explanation? No warning? What did you say?

Will was expecting nothing less than a huge fight, if Mike did in fact still live there. Worst case, Mike would slam the door in his face after telling him to go to Hell. And hey, maybe I deserve that, Will thought as he finally entered the city. Maybe I deserve to be slapped and spit on and screamed at. I'm the lowest of the low for what I did.

Only I'm not, his train of thought quickly added. That title belonged to Mike for cheating.

Will pinched the bridge of his nose as his conscience did its usual Battle of Who's Worse bullshit. Will didn't know if he truly needed Mike, or if his mind was tricking him into thinking he did. There was one thing that Will was very certain he needed, however: A damn drink.

After a pit stop at his old haunt downtown for a whiskey, Will was back on the road. He actually wasn't far from the complex at that point—six blocks, give or take—and he was thankful that he'd stopped for the drink. The bartender was an old college friend of Will's who had worked there for as long as Will could remember. They ended up catching up over Will's drink and nothing much had changed with his friend. He shared with Will that he hadn't seen Mike for about six months, and that he was in really bad shape after Will had left him. Mike would come down to the bar, get drunk, and leave with someone almost every night for the first seven months

after the break-up. This information did nothing to settle Will's anxiety, and he very nearly ordered a second drink in an attempt to further calm his nerves.

But Will wanted to be sober for the potential reunion, and the alcohol that he did consume was helping his nerves a great deal as he drove the excruciatingly slow drive to his old home. Upon seeing the building looming in the distance, Will could feel a warmth spreading in the pit of his stomach that had nothing to do with liquor. It was the feeling of home, of goodness, of hope, of happiness. There was just no other way to describe it; it was like an old friend welcoming him back.

Will parked in the complex's parking garage. As he walked to the building entrance, everything seemed to pass in slow motion. His surroundings were fuzzy and blurred, and it honestly felt as if he were swimming underwater. His ears and head felt as if they were full of white noise as he entered the building, and it was a feeling he couldn't fully shake. Until he saw the inside of the building, that is.

Nothing had changed in the fifteen months since he'd moved out of there. The only difference was the Christmas decorations adorning the lobby. There was a large green tree—artificial, from the looks of it—dressed in different hues of silver, gold, and red. Tinsel of the same colors hung from every doorway in the lobby, and there were fake gifts under the tree as well. For a moment, Will wondered if Mike was going to spend the holidays with anyone other than his family. The very thought made him feel physically sick.

Taking a deep breath, Will boarded the elevator and rode to the fourth floor. He was nervously chewing his lip and bouncing on his heels impatiently as the elevator slowly ascended to the very floor where Mike was, hopefully, still living. He practically ran from that elevator once the doors opened on his old floor, and he could feel his heart swelling with emotion as he saw the familiar hallway. Nothing had changed.

And as Will made his way to his former residence, he couldn't help but wonder if things in 4B had.

Will had no idea how long he just stood outside of his former apartment, but the small amount of whiskey he'd downed earlier appeared to be wearing from his frayed nerves. He cracked his knuckles, bouncing on his heels as he tried to muster the courage to knock on the door. He still had no clue what he would do if Mike actually answered. Would Will run? Would he pour his heart out right there? Would he be completely speechless? Will began to kick himself for being so damn impulsive, but he'd come all this way through city traffic. So, he figured he just as well give it a shot and get it over with, regardless.

The brunet continued standing there for probably five more minutes, surprised that no one had come out of their own apartment to see him just standing there like a creep. Will was also surprised that whoever lived in 4B—whether it was Mike or someone else—hadn't also opened the door to see him there. Will took a few deep breaths, telling himself to calm down and not panic.

After he was certain that he was calm enough, he knocked three times—quickly. Will's heart was thudding so hard and so fast at this point, he was shocked that it hadn't jumped out of his chest. He could hear it pounding in his ears, and it was all that he could focus on. He didn't hear the grumbles of whoever lived inside, or the footsteps approaching the door from inside of the apartment, or the sliding of the lock from within.

Will wasn't sure what to expect when the door swung open, but it certainly wasn't THAT.

3. Chapter 3

“El?!”

Will was sure that his voice echoed in the hallway as he spoke, but he wasn't paying much attention. Will's adopted sister was standing in the open doorway of apartment 4B, wearing one of Mike's oversized shirts and a pair of her own grey leggings. Will's jaw was practically on the floor, mostly from shock and partly because he was trying to figure out what to say. What was El doing here?

“Will,” El said softly, a gentle smile spreading over her lips. “What are you doing here?”

“I might ask you the same thing,” Will said, eyeing El from head to toe with a raised brow. “I thought you were still mad at Mike after everything that happened between us?”

“I am,” El replied, fidgeting with her long, brown braid. “Mike needed me, that's all.”

“Needed you for what?” Will asked curiously, a lump forming in his throat as he gestured toward Mike's shirt on her petite frame. His eyes were wide. “Did—Did you...”

“Oh!” El said, blushing before shaking her head. “No! I came to help him pack up some things for his move.”

Will's blood nearly ran cold at that bit of information, looking past El into the living room. There were a few packed boxes sitting against the far wall, but everything in the living room was still intact. It was still just the same as he left it, fifteen months ago. “He's...where is moving, do you know?”

“In with Nancy,” El stated with a sad smile. “He just can't afford paying rent by himself anymore and...”

“And what?” Will asked worriedly.

“He doesn't want to get a new roommate,” El said slowly, “because he thinks that'll mean replacing you. He just...doesn't want to do

that.”

El invited Will inside, and put on some tea. She explained that she came into the city with Nancy, who was with Mike at the Starbucks downtown. El also said that Nancy missed having Will around, and everyone had still been rooting for them to get back together. Even Hopper had confided in El that nothing had been the same since their split.

Mike had graduated college but barely, El had said. He became almost self-destructive after Will had left, and had resorted to drinking and other risky behaviors to cope. El had heard all of this from Lucas, who had helped Mike quite a bit when things got particularly bad. Mike couldn't even hold down a good job and couldn't afford to pay rent for a single apartment anymore, so he was moving out. He was too prideful to ask for money from anyone, and decided to temporarily move in with Nancy until he was back on his feet. That's all El knew.

“How is he doing now?” Will questioned. “I mean...you know...as of today.”

El shrugged, taking a sip out of her mug. “He seems alright,” she said. “I got my shirt all dusty and dirty when I moved a box, so he gave me a shirt you always used to wear of his. It's a somewhat good sign, I think.”

Will nodded, tracing the rim of his steaming mug with a sigh. “I miss him, El. That's why I'm here. Do you...This is a long shot, but do you know if he's currently seeing anyone? Like a boyfriend or a girlfriend?”

El shook her head with a frown. “Dunno,” she answered. “He was seeing a woman named Katherine about three months ago, but I dunno if he still is or not. Sorry.”

Will's nerves began to flare up again, and he stood at once from the couch. “I should get go—“

“Will,” El said sternly, giving him what Hopper affectionately called “The Look of Death.” Will sat again, and El took his free hand. “You came all this way for him. Give it a chance before you just give up. I know Joyce—Mom—didn’t raise a quitter. You know that, too.”

“But what if he—“ Will began.

“What if’s’ will make you go crazy,” El stated. “Trust me, I know. My therapist once told me to focus on the positive things that are happening in life, and not to dwell on the what if’s. They’ll make you lose your mind.”

“But what’s positive about any of this, El?” Will asked, learning against her as she put an arm around his shoulders. “Tell me, because I see NOTHING.”

“Love,” El replied simply. “You love him, and he loves you. I know. I can see it and I can sense it. Yes, he did something terrible. Yes, you both hurt each other. But there’s still love, Will. Still love.”

Will smiled, resting his head on El’s shoulder. “I made a huge mistake,” he said sadly. “Like...why didn’t I just come back? I—“

“None of that matters now,” El said, tenderly kissing the top of Will’s head. “Talk to him. Explain. If it works, it does. If it doesn’t, you can’t say you didn’t try. Besides, you also have Isaac.”

Will, knowing that Isaac just wasn’t the same as Mike and never would be, only nodded slowly. He just didn’t want to argue with his sister. Not at a time when he needed her the most.

“Nancy will be back soon,” El noted. “So, I think I’ll go meet her. It’ll be less awkward when Mike comes back, if I’m not here.”

Will laughed slightly, standing when El did. They embraced tightly, with El making Will promise to call her when he could to give her the details about what happened. When Will said that he would—and after El said that she’d take the blame for letting Will in if Mike was angry about it—El left.

Will sat back down on the couch, laying down as he finally—properly—got a good look around the living room. It truly hadn’t changed

much at all, and Will couldn't help going back to that morning last September. It was hard to believe that fifteen months had gone by, when everything looked like he'd left it only yesterday.

Will also noticed that there was still a photo of them perched atop the entertainment center—one of their engagement photos, to be exact. Will remembered the day it had been taken: They took a trip to the beach, and Mike had worried almost the entire time that a seagull would fly overhead and shit on them. Will assured him that it wouldn't happen, and they went out for a nice dinner and ice cream after. It was a perfect day, and Will had gone to sleep that night feeling like the luckiest man in the whole world. Here he was, with an amazingly kind and gorgeous man who Will had believed was WAY out of his league, tangled in his limbs with Mike's hair in Will's face as the taller man slept. Will just couldn't help but reflect on how blessed he truly was to have a man like Mike Wheeler in his life, a man that a lot of people would give their own limbs to have for themselves.

But then it was all gone. Their six-year relationship was ended in less than fifteen minutes, all because of one damn—

If you say 'mistake,' Will scolded himself.

He sighed, running his hands over his face before laying completely horizontal on the couch. Will wasn't even aware that he'd fallen asleep, had no idea how long he was even out, until he heard the breaking of glass. Will shot up off the couch as quick as lightening as his eyes sprang open, looking around for a moment to determine the source of the noise. It didn't take him long to find it, and he very nearly fell to the floor when he saw.

Mike.

Will wasn't sure if it was seconds or minutes that he stood there, just looking at his former lover. Mike still looked like the same old Mike, only his hair was a bit longer and shaggier, his face had the faintest hint of stubble, and it appeared as though his wiry frame had acquired a small amount of muscle. But he still dressed in the same T-

shirts and jeans as he always had, still had the same alluring gaze in those deep brown eyes, and was still just Mike. Mike's expressions were hard to read as always, and Will couldn't tell if Mike wanted to scream at him, fight with him, kick him out, hug him, or even kiss him. Neither of them were speaking at the moment, because neither of them could. The shock of seeing each other after fifteen months, under these circumstances, had rendered them both speechless.

Will found himself just wanting to run. He wanted to go to the door and just leave before things got too heavy. The silence was also beginning to grow uncomfortable, and Will just didn't like the way that Mike was looking at him

(with those powerful, beautiful eyes)

and he just wanted to get out. To distract himself from those thoughts, he allowed his eyes to trail to the floor to see what had broken. He saw at once that it was a bottle of whiskey, one that Mike had presumably dropped in his shock. The amber liquid spread over the floor in a glassy flood, the smell of it filling Will's senses and making him feel slightly dizzy.

Or maybe that was just his nerves.

Will didn't know what to do at this point. The tension was hanging too thickly between them, and it was becoming more obvious by the second that Mike wasn't going to say or do anything. Will remembered what El had said, that Mike was still in love with him, and Will decided that he honestly had nothing to lose. Sure, he'd be heartbroken if it backfired, but it had also been over a year since they last stood face-to-face. He swallowed thickly, his feet carrying him toward Mike before he could fully process what he was doing. As he moved closer to Mike, he could see that Mike's eyes were growing wider. Whether it was in surprise, curiosity, anger, or all three, Will didn't know.

It didn't matter now, anyway. Before Mike or Will were aware that it was happening, Will's hands were on either side of Mike's face as he stood on his tiptoes, pulling Mike down for a passionate kiss. His lips tasted just the same as Will had remembered—coffee, spearmint toothpaste, vanilla, the faintest hint of cherries—and Will honestly

felt as if he was finally home. He was relieved when Mike didn't push him away, instead returning the kiss as he tasted the whiskey coating Will's own lips. Will knew that Mike could taste it, and felt self-conscious for a moment. Then again, there was a hint of vodka on Mike's own breath—not a lot—but still enough to bring a taste. Will didn't care; these were the very lips that he'd missed so badly for so long. Mike could taste like nothing at all and Will would have still been completely satisfied.

Before Will knew what was happening, he felt his back collide with the front door. Mike was still kissing him, hands on Will's thighs to coax the smaller man to jump. He did and Mike caught him, wrapping Will's legs around his waist. Will ran his fingers through Mike's hair—still just as soft as Will's memory always recalled—and Mike tugged lovingly on Will's.

"Mike," Will breathed between kisses. "I missed you."

"Will," Mike whispered. Will noticed, at once, that Mike had a single tear running down one of his freckled cheeks. "Are you r-really here? Is this a dream? Another hallucination?"

Will could feel his heart breaking at the last sentence, shaking his head as he fought off tears of his own. Will didn't want to know what Mike had meant by "another hallucination," and decided not to ask. "No, I'm here. It's really me. I thought...Didn't El tell you she let me in when I came by earlier?"

Mike shook his head, kissing tenderly over Will's cheeks. "No, she didn't," Mike murmured. "Nancy whisked her away pretty quickly. I could tell something was on her mind, though. I had no idea..."

Will smiled, biting his own lip as he played with Mike's hair. The taller man began to kiss him again, and Will found himself getting lost in Mike, just like the old days. Will felt the door vanish under his back, and was aware that Mike was now carrying him. Will pulled back, and could tell which direction Mike was taking him in.

The bedroom.

"Mike, no," Will murmured. "No."

“Why?” Mike asked, puzzled. “I mean...that’s why you’re here, right? To toy with me, make me believe we have something after you pretend to care and love me, and then just walk out on me? Again?”

Well, that turned fairly ugly rather quickly, Will thought sadly.

“Is that what you think?” Will asked, his own eyes wide and beginning to cloud with hurt at Mike’s words. “You think I’m only here for—“

“It’s been fifteen months, Will!” Mike cried, setting Will down so quickly that he nearly dropped him. “You walked out and ignored me for over a damn year! Now you’re here and you want, what? To say you’re sorry?”

Mike was staring Will down angrily now. Will felt like a deer caught in headlights, but he still felt anger beginning to boil in his stomach. Was Mike seriously pissed at Will for leaving him, for a valid reason?

“I left because you cheated on me!” Will yelled. “You slept with someone else and you hurt me. You can play the mistake card all you want, but it was still a choice! You could have refused and you didn’t! How do you think I felt, Mike? HUH?!”

“You could have at least given me closure, Will!” Mike roared, an enraged hand swiping the empty beer cans and various emptied liquor bottles littering the living room bar. Some bottles shattered, others just rolled every which way. The cans rattled and bounced musically across the floor. Will winced at the noises, immediately shrinking back from Mike. “You purposefully ignored me, when all I wanted was some goddamn finality!”

“Then why all the messages you sent with Lucas and Dustin?” Will questioned. “All of the ‘Tell Will that I still love him and I wanna talk and apologize’ bullshit?”

“I was trying to be a decent human being!” Mike thundered. “I wanted closure. I wanted to try apologizing again, and I wanted us to work through this! If it brought us back together, then fine! Great! If we only remained friends, then fine! But I didn’t deserve to be treated like Supreme Asshole of the Year and be ignored like that by my best

friend! That hurt, Will! IT HURT!"

Will was silent for a moment, taking a step toward Mike as Mike took one away. "Mike," Will began softly. "I couldn't—"

"You COULDN'T?!" Mike asked incredulously. "Why the hell NOT?!"

"Because I was in pain!" Will cried. "I was afraid that talking to you or seeing you would trigger everything and I needed some time to heal!"

"Only took you a damn year and a half," Mike snarked. "Why now? Why after fifteen months, Will? WHY?!"

"Because I'm ready now!" Will said, holding his hand out for Mike to take. "I...I never stopped loving you, Mike! Never. Time apart didn't change that at all. Despite how deeply my pain went, I always loved you."

Mike was panting, his face still twisted in rage. He just stared at Will's hand with fiery eyes, until Will awkwardly dropped it to his side. "So why did you ignore me?" Mike asked. "If you loved me oh-so-much—"

"I was hurting, I said!" Will replied coldly. "There was still so much pain and I didn't want to add to that. But now I hurt less and miss you more, and I wanted to see you. Mike, I love you and I'm sorry. Okay? I truly am. For leaving, for ignoring you, for everything I did that ever hurt you."

"You think an apology is going to fix this?" Mike asked. "Like just saying 'I'm sorry' is supposed to repair everything you did?"

"I dunno," Will said with a shrug. "But I hope it does. I just...one of the reasons why I left and why it hurt so badly is because...my dad—Lonnie—used to do the same thing to Mom. He'd go out, get drunk, sleep with someone, and he & Mom would constantly fight about it. I didn't want—"

"I am not Lonnie, Will," Mike said through gritted teeth. "I can't believe—"

“I know you aren’t him,” Will said quickly. “You’re better than he could ever be. I just...I was taken back to when I was a kid. It sent me back and I just—I’m sorry. That’s the best I can do, Mike.”

Mike reached down into the front of his JOE’S MOTORBIKES EST. 1982 shirt, pulling out two rings on a chain. Will recognized them immediately as their old engagement rings. “See these?” Mike asked. “These once meant something, Will. We were going to spend forever together. Then you threw yours in my face like it never meant shit to you. Like it was some cheap, worthless piece of fake gold jewelry.”

Will was silent for a moment, then looked up at Mike as his lips curled inward. “Okay,” he whispered, completely defeated. Nothing was working, they were fighting instead of being reasonable, and Will decided that it was just a lost cause. “I can see that you still have a ton of hard feelings and you don’t want me here. I’ll just...take my horrible self and leave your apartment. Sorry for intruding on you; I’ll get out of your life now.”

Those words seemed to sober Mike. As Will walked to the front door to leave, Mike grabbed Will’s arm, gently spinning him around for a tender, desperate kiss. “No,” he whispered against Will’s lips. “Don’t you dare leave me again, Will Byers. Don’t you dare.”

Will didn’t leave. Instead, he and Mike drank coffee and snuggled on the couch, silent for what seemed like hours until Mike filled him in his life in the last fifteen months. Will already knew about some from what El had told him, but he also learned that Mike wasn’t dating anyone currently. Will told Mike about what he’d been up to as well, but left out one very crucial detail.

Isaac.

Will knew that it was wrong of him to do, but he felt as though bringing up his current partner would only spoil the reunion. He planned on breaking up with Isaac the next day, especially since Mike had confessed that he wanted to get back together. So why tell Mike about him? Why not tell a little lie when Mike asked if Will was seeing anyone? Why create unnecessary drama with the truth?

Will spent the night with Mike, cuddling in bed with him while wearing one of Mike's oversized sweaters in lieu of pajamas. He fell asleep to Mike kissing lovingly over what was exposed of his shoulders and collarbones, with Mike humming a lullaby like he always used to. Will closed his eyes, knowing that he was home, safe, and back in the warm, loving embrace of his soulmate.

But that was about to change.

Mike watched Will sleeping for a while, taking in his sleeping, delicate features. It felt as though they were never apart, and an idea suddenly struck Mike. He wanted to write Will a surprise love poem, like in the old days of their relationship. He gently laid Will from his arms, gliding to his desk before working on the poem. When he was satisfied, he decided to fold it up and put it in one place Will would never expect: Will's wallet.

Mike moved to Will's folded jeans, finding his wallet in his back pocket. He opened it, trying to find the perfect spot where Will would be able to see it. Mike turned to the middle, and what he saw there caused his heart to nearly stop.

It was a photograph, one that made Mike's blood run cold and the air to leave his lungs as though he'd just been punched in the stomach. Will was in the photograph, but so was another man. He was an attractive blonde, his arm around Will as Will laid a hand on the blonde's chest. Something else stood out in the photo, and that was the beautiful silver band wrapped around Will's ring finger. It didn't take Mike long to realize that it was an engagement ring.

Maybe it was an old photo? After all, there hadn't been a ring on Will's finger when he arrived at Mike's; he would have noticed. It would be hard to miss, after all. He stuffed the wallet back into Will's pocket, digging through the rest of them to see if he could find a ring. He hit pay-dirt in Will's left front pocket, the silver band in the picture rolling out into Mike's palm. He moved into the bedroom bathroom, turning on the light to read the inscription. It said:

DARLING WILL. I'LL LOVE YOU FOREVER. ISAAC.

Mike could feel tears prickling his eyes and nausea settling in his

stomach. Will had lied right to his face. Will had been back in Mike's life for ten hours, and he was already breaking Mike's heart again. It didn't make Mike feel any better that Will had cheated on his fiancé with Mike, and Mike could feel bile rising in his throat as he exited the bathroom. He slipped the ring into the same pocket he'd found it, examining Will's sleeping form for a moment. Will looked so innocent in sleep, and Mike just couldn't believe that this was happening. Will, of all people lying to him? What else had he lied about, if he could lie about something this major?

Mike decided that he didn't want to think about it anymore. Grabbing a shirt and some pants, he hastily tore up the poem he'd written and discarded it in the bedroom wastebasket. He stormed out of the apartment, his rage boiling hot in his veins. Mike didn't realize that he was crying until he tasted the salt of his tears in the corner of his mouth. His body just collapsed against his car, the force of his broken sobs just completely winding him.

It was already over once more, before they could even properly form their new beginning.

4. Chapter 4

Mike found himself at the local watering hole that night—the same one that Will had stepped into earlier that day, to be exact. It was crowded and, as most bars were, was smoky and reeked of booze. Mike didn't care, though; he just wanted to down some whiskey and forget all about Will Byers. But he knew that all of the bourbon in the world would never erase Will from his mind permanently.

Mike could try, but it would never happen. He knew that from plenty of experience.

He took a seat on a stool at the bar, finding that it wasn't as crowded for the most part. Everyone was mostly dancing or chatting elsewhere, and Mike was grateful for that. He didn't feel like socializing with anyone at that particular moment, and he was sure that it showed. The people that he did encounter moved out of his path immediately, and Mike figured that it was probably because he looked absolutely homicidal. His heartbreak was slowing boiling to anger, and he was glad that people were steering clear of him. He really didn't want to start a fight tonight, on top of everything else.

The bartender gave Mike a small glass of whiskey when he ordered it, downing it quickly and ordering another. It was then that the other bartender—Will's friend, as it turned out—sat next to him at the bar. He ordered a gin and tonic, and Mike realized that he was off the clock. Of course he is, Mike thought stupidly. The other guy is working instead, you idiot.

“Hey, Mikey! Long time, no see!” the man exclaimed with a grin when he glanced in Mike's direction. The grin soon disappeared when he got a good look at Mike, frowning as he swallowed some of his drink. “Woah. Hey, don't take this personally, man, but...you look awful. Are you okay?”

Mike laughed humorlessly, knowing back his second drink and ordering a third. He was thankful that he could hold his liquor well, or else he'd probably be on the floor right now. “Yeah. You'd look like shit, too, if your ex-fiancé lied right to your face. Like you aren't worth the damn truth.”

The other man frowned, finishing his drink and ordering a second. "Wait. Are you talking about Will? Will Byers? Little Will Byers? He lied to you?!"

"Yep," Mike said, tracing the rim of his glass with a heavy sigh. "I'm just...I don't know what to do, Steven. What do you do when someone you love lies to you about something so major? What...How do you even mend that?"

"Well," Steven said, "what did he lie about?"

"Fiancé," Mike replied, almost hoarsely. "We got back together, but only after he told me that he wasn't seeing anyone. I was leaving a surprise in his wallet, when I saw a picture of him with this dude named Isaac. Turns out he's engaged to this guy and he didn't bother telling me the truth. How could he lie about that?"

Steven shrugged, turning on the stool to face Mike. "I'm sure he had his reasons. Not that I'm excusing what he did, but it's Will, Mike. He'd never do that unless he had good reason for it."

"Doesn't matter," Mike mumbled. "Lies are lies, and that one was a pretty big one. How can I ever forgive him for that?"

"Isaac doesn't sound like a bad guy, though," Steven stated. "From what Will told me today, he sounds like a sweetheart."

Mike sat up straight, nearly spilling his drink in his shock. "Wait, what?" Mike asked. "When did you see him?! I mean...when today?"

"He popped in earlier today, when I was working," Steven answered. "Said he was going to go see you and we caught up a bit. He told me all about Isaac."

"Well, what did he say?!" Mike asked, eyes wide as he fought the urge to just shake the other man.

"Not much, really," Steven said, gulping the rest of his gin and tonic. "Will said that Isaac was a doctor now, he was nearing the age of thirty, he was blonde, blue-eyed, and beautiful, that they recently bought a house together in the suburbs—"

“The suburbs?” Mike asked abruptly. “Which ones? Which house?”

“Mike,” Steven said sharply.

“Tell me,” Mike snapped. “Now!”

Some people were staring at them now, but neither Mike nor Steven were paying much attention. “Fine,” Steven said with a sigh. “I’ll tell you, as long as you swear you won’t do something stupid.”

“Cross my heart and hope to die,” Mike lied. “Now tell me, goddammit.”

Steven named the place where Will was living, watching the fire in Mike’s eyes blaze brighter and more dangerous. He immediately regretted saying anything, but still added a few more details that Will had casually mentioned. “He said it was a big, light blue, beautiful house. He also mentioned that Isaac drives a Porsche, but I dunno if it sits in the driveway or in the garage. A car that expensive is probably parked in a garage out of sight, I’d wager.”

Mike nodded, sniffing angrily as he finally downed his third drink. “Thanks for the info,” he said, getting up and throwing money on the counter for his & Steven’s drinks. “Truly appreciate it.”

“Hey,” Steven said, gently taking Mike’s arm. “Don’t do anything foolish or irreparable.”

“I won’t,” Mike said, winking at Steven before exiting the bar.

Turns out, Mike’s lie had been convincing enough for Steven and had set the man at ease. Mike had plans, though, ones that no one needed to know about. He was going to pay a visit to the son of a bitch in the suburbs, and Will or Steven would never, in a million years, be able to stop him.

Mike arrived at Isaac’s house at a little past midnight. He found it with surprising ease, and didn’t even have to check the garage for the Porsche. Their house was the only light blue one on the entire block, so it hadn’t been that difficult to find. Mike also noticed that the

lights were on inside—a good sign that Mike wouldn't have to sleep in his car overnight. He wondered, for a moment, if Isaac was in there cheating on Will. What delicious irony that would be! Mike thought with a near-hysterical laugh, getting his bearings and exiting the vehicle. He had parked across the street, not wanting to trigger any kind of alarm bells for the scumbag inside—if he'd happen to see headlights or hear the car pulling into the driveway. Mike couldn't help but wonder what Will had told Isaac about him, if Isaac knew about the breakup and the circumstances surrounding it.

Mike could only hope that Will had told Isaac the truth.

Mike's mouth felt like cotton as he approached the front door. At the forefront of his mind was the thought that Will—his Will—lived here with another man. It was a damn nice house, and if Will had been honest with Steven, then Isaac had a promising career as a doctor. That meant that he was a lover of life, and wanted to dedicate his own life to helping others. Doctors also made a shitload of money, so why was Will going to throw all of that away to be with Mike?

He isn't, Mike thought sadly. He only came back today to screw with me. All of this only proves that point even further.

Mike took another moment to collect himself, the liquor he'd drank earlier seeming to make him anxious rather than calm. For a moment, reason began to shine through the cloud of anger in his mind, and he debated getting back in his car to at least think over what he was going to say or do. But Mike already knew what he wanted to do, and it wasn't exactly going to be pleasant. If Will didn't hate him before...he surely would after this.

Taking a deep breath, Mike rang the doorbell. There was no answer and he wondered if Isaac thought that it was some kind of late night prank, a game of ding-dong-ditch played by the neighborhood hooligans. He rang it twice more, rapidly, with no answer still. Mike sighed, ready to just give up and wait until morning, before lifting his fist to knock.

That's when the door opened.

Mike was now standing face-to-face with a breathtakingly beautiful

blonde man, one that Mike immediately recognized from Will's wallet photo as Isaac. He was a bit taller than Mike—maybe three or so inches—and was as wiry as Mike once was. He was in a bathrobe, one hand stuffed into the pocket of it. Mike wondered, for one sickening moment, if he had a gun hidden there.

"Can I help you, sir?" Isaac asked, an unmistakable British accent of some sort in his voice, brow raised as he studied Mike from top to bottom. "Do you have any clue as to what time it is?"

"I do," Mike said coolly. "I'm here about Will."

Isaac's eyes widened in fear, steadying himself against the doorframe for a moment. "Are you a cop?" he asked worriedly. "Was he...I-Is he...?"

"I'm not a cop, dumbass," Mike said irritably. "I'm his ex-fiancé. Or current fiancé, I guess. I don't really know anymore, to be honest."

To Mike's surprise, Isaac threw his head back in laughter. "What?!" he questioned between giggles. "There must be some sort of mistake. I'M his fiancé, and he told me that he was never engaged before. Who are you?!"

Now it was Mike's turn to laugh. "Like Will never mentioned me before," he said. "I'm Mike. Mike Wheeler? Fiancé number-one? Guy that Will dated for over six years? Ring any bells, blondie?"

Isaac furrowed his brows, his hand protectively clutching whatever was in his robe pocket. "He never mentioned you to me," Isaac said. "Honestly, bloke. I don't know what kind of sick joke this is, but I want you to leave. Now. Before I phone the police."

Mike reached down inside of his shirt, pulling out the chain with the engagement rings around it. He removed the chain from his neck, handing it to Isaac and putting his hands to his sides once Isaac took it. Mike thought, for one horrible second, that Isaac had been lying about not knowing who he was. But seeing the confusion and brief flash of pain in his eyes as Isaac read the ring inscriptions told Mike that Isaac had been truthful. Will actually hadn't told Isaac anything about Mike, or their past together.

Which meant that he had lied to someone else about something majorly crucial. Imagine that, Mike thought bitterly.

“Bugger,” Isaac breathed, handing the rings back to Mike. Mike clasped the chain around his neck again, tucking the rings back into his shirt. “I...How do I know that was Will Byers, though? How do I know this wasn’t another guy named Will and this is just a hoax?”

Mike mulled it over, then said: “He has a beauty mark freckle on his stomach, closer to his right rib-cage. His birthday is July 7th, which makes him a Cancer—which, in my opinion, suits him perfectly. He also grew up a few hours away, in Hawkins...with me, as it turns out. Oh, and his favorite pizza topping is pepperoni and he hates the crust. He says they just taste unnatural, that pizza shouldn’t even have crust.”

Isaac was silent, his empty hand slipping out of his pocket after a moment. “I...” he began. “God, I didn’t know. Honestly. He never told me about you at all. Hey, do you wanna come in? I know it’s gotta be cold out there.”

Mike nodded, stepping into the warmth of the house. It was much nicer on the inside, Mike observed. Much nicer than his own apartment, and that was saying a lot. He followed Isaac into the spacious kitchen, sitting at the table as Isaac instructed him to do so. Isaac put on some coffee—decaf, Mike thought with disgust—and sat when it was finished. Isaac was silent for what seemed like hours, before he finally spoke.

“He isn’t really with friends, is he?” Isaac questioned, his voice low. “He’s with you.”

“Yeah,” Mike said. “Back at my apartment in the city, but yes. He is with me.”

Isaac’s eyes widened, the coffee mug stilling at his lips as he went to take a sip. “Did you two—“

“No!” Mike cried. “I mean. We did kiss, but we—“

“You kissed him?!” Isaac exclaimed, almost dropping his mug.

“What?!”

“He initiated it,” Mike said. “But yeah. We kissed, but that’s all we did. I promise.”

Isaac sunk back into his chair, a look of utter disbelief on his delicate features. “You knew he was engaged and you just let him kiss you?!”

“I didn’t know at the time!” Mike defended. “He wasn’t wearing his ring, he told me he wasn’t seeing anyone, and we hadn’t seen each other for fifteen months! Look. I never would have let him kiss me if I had known about you. If I knew he had a...a fiancé, I would have stopped him from even doing it in the first place.”

“Uh huh,” Isaac said skeptically. “How did you find out about me, then? If he didn’t tell you, then how did you know?”

Mike explained Steven and the accidental discovery of the ring & the photo, watching Isaac’s face crumble in first anger then in pure pain. Mike drummed his fingers on the table, watching as Isaac got up to retrieve something out of one of the cupboards. Mike saw at once that it was a bottle of vodka, Isaac twisting the cap off and pouring a generous amount into his shitty decaffeinated coffee.

“Why did you come here?” Isaac asked. “To rub the fact that I was cheated on in my face? The fact that I was lied to? Hm?”

“I came here to beat your ass, if I’m being honest,” Mike said, observing his own fingernails as if they were suddenly of particular interest. “But you just seemed so nice and really pretty, if I’m telling you the truth, so I dunno. The fact that you didn’t even know about me kinda turned me off of it.”

Isaac chuckled, taking a long sip of his vodka-laced coffee. “I still can’t believe that he lied. To me, to you.”

“Me, either,” Mike said. “It isn’t like Will, and I sincerely mean that. He’s the kind of person who hates lying—both being lied to and telling them. I don’t understand why he’d do this. I’ve tried to see one good reason, but I just can’t.”

Isaac nodded, sliding the bottle across the table to Mike. “Want

some?”

“Nah,” Mike said, waving his hand. “I gotta drive back later, and I already had three small glasses of whiskey. Thanks, though.”

“And you’re still sober?” Isaac asked, amazed. “Holy damn. I wish that I could hold my liquor like that. I’m a bit of a lightweight, more or less. Just like...well. Will.”

Mike smiled sadly, running his fingers over the bottle. “Your accent,” he said. “Where are you from?”

“Wales,” Isaac replied proudly. “Born and raised, actually. I came here to go to school, because the medical programs here were better. I can even speak Welsh and everything.”

“That is so cool,” Mike marveled. “I hear that’s mostly a dead language nowadays.”

“It is,” Isaac said. “More or less, but my family has spoken it for generations. Reckon my kids and their kids and so on will speak it, too.”

Mike was silent for a few moments before changing the subject. “I still love Will, Isaac,” he said. “A lot. He’s...He’s the love of my life. I don’t want to ever let him go again. I already had to do that once, and I don’t want a repeat of that pain.”

Isaac sighed, abandoning the coffee and settling on drinking the vodka straight from the bottle. “I love him, too,” Isaac replied shortly. “He’s my soulmate. I’ve never felt a connection like the one I have with Will. I don’t think I ever will again, either. Yeah, he lied to me and yeah, he cheated on me. But it’s not like he slept with you or anyone else, and it’s not like he lied about killing someone. I’m not going to give up on him.”

“He said that he wanted to get back together with me!” Mike nearly shouted. “Even before I knew about you, I could see it in his eyes! You should let HIM do the choosing!”

“Oh! And if he chooses you, what are you going to do?” Isaac cried, his bright blue eyes blazing with fury. “Are you just going to dump

him for lying to you? Face it, Mike. He's gonna feel too guilty for lying and break up with you. Then he's gonna run back into my arms instead. We won't tell him about this little meeting, yeah? That'll make it a lot easier for him."

"Like hell!" Mike yelled. "I'm not keeping this from him!"

"Ooh, look at Mr. Morals all of a sudden!" Isaac cried, taking a long swig from the bottle. "The very man who admitted that he wanted to kick my ass is now concerned with lying!"

Mike stood immediately, glaring daggers at Isaac. "You'll tell him, anyway!" he roared. "You know, to turn him against me so you can have him all to yourself!"

Isaac scoffed, sitting back in his chair. Mike couldn't help but notice how much prettier he looked when he was angry, and he hated himself for such an observation. This was Will's fiancé, for God's sake.

"I'm not an asshole, Mike!" Isaac shouted. "I would never do a thing like that!"

"Then let him choose!" Mike said. "Let me talk to him, okay? Let me —"

"Why?!" Isaac screamed. "To talk him into choosing you instead of me? No way! Let him go on as normal. If he wants you—"

"It isn't an 'if!'" Mike cried, then pinched the bridge of his nose before running a hand through his messy dark hair. "We sound like a couple of bickering kids. Can we talk about this civilly? You know, like adults."

"We can try," Isaac replied. "But I'm still not gonna budge on this."

Mike sighed, stuffing his hands into his jeans pockets. "Isaac. I've loved him since I was a kid. We've been together since we were sixteen years old. He is my love, and my soulmate, and the man that I want to marry and have kids with. It is our lifetime, and our marriage, and our family. I was devastated when he left me, Isaac. I cheated on him, you know. It was a drunken, stupid mistake that I

regret every single minute of every day. I'm total scum for what I did and for the way that I hurt him, and I would never dream of making that same mistake again. If he comes back into my life as my lover, my fiancé, my husband, I'm dedicated to never touching another drop of alcohol, to prevent it from ever happening again.

"Isaac, please. You don't understand. I would move mountains and swim all of the oceans to be with him and to make him happy. My guilt consumes me every damn day. I used everything you could think of to try and dull the pain, but nothing ever worked. When he came back today, when I saw him in my apartment, the stars aligned again. My life became whole and gained purpose for the very first time since he left last year. Please, Isaac. I'll get down on my knees and beg if I have to. Just...please."

Isaac looked at the ground as Mike stopped speaking, sniffing before standing. "You're a sweet bloke, Mike Wheeler," he said, taking a few steps to close the space between them. Mike looked up into his eyes, swallowing hard when he realized how close Isaac had truly gotten to him. "Will is lucky to have you. Or to have had you, whichever it is."

Before Mike could respond, Isaac's lips pressed softly to his, silencing any and all thoughts that he had on the matter.

5. Chapter 5

Will woke the following morning to the sunlight streaming through the apartment bedroom window. He also noticed immediately that Mike wasn't in bed with him anymore and that he was alone in the room, tangled in the sheets and arms still splayed from where he'd fallen asleep in Mike's arms. Thinking that Mike had gotten up to make coffee or perhaps watch TV or do some early laundry, Will peeked out into the living room and didn't see Mike anywhere in sight. In fact, the apartment was completely silent, except for the low hum of the refrigerator in the kitchen.

Maybe he went down to Starbucks for some coffee, Will thought as he took off the sweater he'd worn to bed the previous night. His boxers were next as he made his way to the bathroom for a much-needed shower. He just went out to get us some coffee and he'll be back soon. I'll cook breakfast and it'll be ready by the time he gets back. Then I can go to Isaac's, talk with him, and give the ring back. I'll be back here in time for lunch!

Will's shower was a quick one, keeping his ears open for any sign of Mike coming in. There was still nothing but silence as he dried off and sauntered into Mike's bedroom—their old room they shared together, once upon a time—and dug through Mike's drawers for clothes. He resolved to grab a few of his own once he got to his house—soon-to-be just Isaac's house—when he went there later in the day. Will settled on a pair of Superman boxers (big around the waist but still tight enough to properly fit) and a Millennium Falcon T-shirt. The shirt fell to mid-thigh on Will, and he walked into the kitchen feeling refreshed and, for the first time in awhile, absolutely adorable in his own eyes.

Will grabbed some eggs from the fridge to scramble, bread, bacon, French toast sticks, and he also found strawberry jelly for the toast. He started frying the bacon first, humming to himself before glancing toward the living room stereo. He also remembered—and saw—the glassy mess from yesterday still littering the floor of the living room. Not wanting Mike to hurt himself—and wondering why Mike hadn't bothered to clean up himself before leaving—Will turned the heat

down on the bacon before going into the bedroom and slipping on Mike's slippers. He then got the broom and dustpan, as well as the mopping supplies, out of the small utility closet in the kitchen. He began sweeping up the glass slivers of broken bottles, discarding the scattered empty beer cans in the garbage along with the glass. Once it had been cleaned up, Will began mopping up the dried whiskey from where Mike had dropped the bottle. It was hard to believe that all of this had taken place less than twenty-four hours prior; it felt as though it had occurred months ago.

After everything was wiped up and thrown away, Will turned on the stereo. The first song that played was Angel by Aerosmith, one of Will's personal favorite songs and one that reminded him so much of Mike. Will resumed cooking, frying the bacon while simultaneously cooking the French toast sticks. He began to hum along happily to the song, his heart bursting with love for Mike Wheeler as a grin stretched across his lips. His hips began to sway to the music, his eyes closing for a moment as he got lost in the lyrics of the music. He danced his way over to the fridge as the song changed to The Cure's Lovesong—another of Will's favorites. He rocked his hips skillfully, dancing to the cupboards once he found the orange juice. Will fished out two cups, setting them on the counter as he prepared to scramble the eggs.

As he brought the eggs over to the stove, the front door of the apartment opened. He made sure that everything on the stove was turned off, running out of the kitchen with a huge grin on his delicate face. Will wanted to leap and jump into Mike's arms and pepper his face in kisses, just like the old days when Mike would come home from classes or swim practice. But as soon as he ran out and saw the look on Mike's face, Will stopped dead in his tracks. The smile was wiped immediately from his lips and he couldn't help but shrink back a bit.

Mike looked absolutely livid as he shut off the stereo, slamming the door behind him as he stepped into the apartment. There was also a hint of pain under that angry gaze, Mike's hands balled into fists by his sides. His lips were drawn back, but not in a friendly, happy smile; they were drawn back in a mirthless grin. It chilled Will to his very core, seeing that expression painted across Mike's face.

“So, Will,” Mike said, taking a step closer to Will. “I visited a very special someone last night. Do you wanna guess who?”

Will shrugged, looking at Mike with a tilt of his head. “I don’t know. El?”

Mike barked laughter, shaking his head before those stormy brown eyes landed on Will. “No, you lying little slut,” Mike hissed. “I’m talking about Isaac.”

Will could feel all of the air leaving his lungs in a whoosh. The world spun for a moment, and he had to sit in the chair nearest him. His mouth and throat went dry at once, his heart hammering loudly in his ears. How in the hell did Mike find out about Isaac? And if what he just said is true, then Isaac now knew about Mike and their past together. And if Isaac truly knew about that...

The smell of breakfast in the apartment was no longer appetizing; Will thought that he was going to be sick. He began to blink back into focus, his eyes finding Mike again. Will squeezed his hand into a fist in an attempt to settle his nerves, but it did no good. He could feel bile rising in his throat, and he immediately fought the urge to vomit.

“How...” Will began after a moment, swallowing reflexively in his dry throat. “How...How did you...”

“How did I find out you fucking lied to me?” Mike asked angrily, causing Will to flinch. Mike never cursed like that unless he was beyond pissed. “Well, let’s see. You told me last night that you wanted to get back together with me. So in a way, we did, because you said you were single and it was fine! Until I decided to write you a love poem last night and put it in your wallet as a surprise. What do you think I found upon opening your wallet, hm? Take a guess.”

Will’s eyes widened, averting from Mike’s gaze as his heart pounded heavily in his throat. “You saw...You saw the picture of us, didn’t

you?” Will asked, voice barely audible through the rough dryness of his throat. “You saw me and...and Isaac. Our engagement photo.”

“Ding-ding-ding!” Mike chirped, laughing earnestly as he took another step toward Will. “But I’ll bet you’re wondering, ‘golly gee, Mikey! How did you find out his name?!’ Wanna take another guess to that little question, Willie?”

“You...You found my engagement ring,” Will said softly. “You saw the ring in the photo and noticed I wasn’t wearing it when I came here, so you dug through my pockets and found it. Then, you read the inscription and you saw his name. You...Mike, you had no right to violate my privacy like that. None. You—“

“YOU HAD NO RIGHT TO LIE TO ME!” Mike roared, smacking the wall next to him in his rage. “What the fuck, Will?! Why did you do that me?! Was I not worth the truth?! Huh?!”

“I was gonna break up with him today!” Will yelled, the tightness in his throat letting up some as he found his voice. “I didn’t see much of a need to tell you, because I didn’t think it mattered at that point!”

“IT DOES FUCKING MATTER, YOU STUPID FUCKING BITCH!” Mike screamed, throwing his keys and missing Will by less than two inches. Will yelped, his hands coming up to cover his face for a moment. “You could have told me that! You could have at least mentioned that you are FUCKING GETTING MARRIED, WILL! That is fucking major and you LIED TO ME ABOUT IT!”

“I’m sorry!” Will said tearfully. “I know it was wrong! I messed up, but I...You did, too! You cheated on me last year, Mike! You hurt me as well!”

“Don’t you fucking dare!” Mike hissed. “Don’t you throw that back in my face! I came clean right after it happened! I didn’t fucking hide it or try to lie and cover it up! You, on the other hand, lied right from the start! What I did and what you did are not the same things. Stop comparing them!”

“They are the same things and you know it!” Will cried. “You hurt me by cheating and I hurt you by lying. We’re even!”

“Actually,” Mike said, his eyes fiery as they fell on Will again, “you hurt me by leaving. Two strikes to my one. You fucked up, Will. Big time.”

Will looked down, tears stinging his eyes as a few dripped from his long lashes and onto his cheeks. That’s when he remembered something that Mike had mentioned a few moments earlier. “You said that you visited Isaac last night. Mike...What did you do? How did you even find him?”

Mike shrugged, smirking evilly. “Your little bartender friend, Steven, told me where you two were living last night when I went downtown for a drink. So, I drove out there. You have a super-hot fiancé, Will, do you know that? Of course you do; any idiot with eyes would know that. I mean, he’s a DREAM: Blonde hair, blue eyes, killer body, good heart, Welsh accent, a fucking doctor. You have quite a keeper there.”

“What did you do to him?” Will asked, his voice small. “Mike, I swear to God if you hurt him—“

“I didn’t hurt your boy toy so fucking chill out,” Mike said irritably. “He wasn’t happy that you lied to him or that you kept me a secret, though. He kissed me, and then we slept together. We both had enough of you and your fucking bullshit, and decided to just let our attraction to each other unfold. We slept together and it was absolutely fantastic! We—“

But Mike never got to finish that sentence. The words hit Will like a train and after the split second of shock had set in, anger spread like wildfire through his entire body. That rage, that heartbreak, over the fact that both men he loved had betrayed him, was almost too much to bear. That fury carried him across the room, his hand colliding with Mike’s cheek in a hard slap. The sound echoed all around, Mike yelping and grabbing his reddened cheek. His eyes, still full of anger, were now filling with pain and even a hint of the Mike that Will had loved for so many years.

“How could you?!” Will screamed in Mike’s face. “That makes twice now for you, and with my own fiancé?! What is wrong with you?! You claim to love me, then you go and do this to me! Isaac, too, but

I'll talk to him later. This is between you and me right now, you piece of shit."

Mike's laugh lacked any humor, shoving Will's chest so hard in his rage that Will toppled to the floor. "I want you to leave," Mike spat venomously. "I want you to get out. Get your worthless fucking ass out of my clothes and get out of my apartment. I'm done, Will. I'm done having my heart broken by you. I deserve so much better than this. I never want to see or hear from you ever again."

Those words hurt Will to his very core. He couldn't stop the tears from flowing freely now, and they ran down his cheeks in warm, thin streams. "Mike, don't," he begged. "We can work this out—"

"No, we can't!" Mike shouted. "How can I ever trust you again? Hm? How can I trust you not to lie to me again when you lied about something so huge? You are a shitty person, let's face it. You've always been a fucking pathetic, clingy little whore. You know that?"

"Lying about Isaac was different!" Will exclaimed. "Mike, you gotta believe me—"

"I don't want to hear anymore!" Mike cried. "GET OUT!"

Will moved from the floor, whimpering as he slowly moved toward the bedroom. He undressed, changing back into his clothes from the day before. He heard Mike screaming and throwing things around in the kitchen, and suspected that his half-complete breakfast was now decorating the walls and floor. Will gazed miserably at Mike's clothes on the bed that he'd changed out of, reflecting on how happy he'd been when he put them on earlier. Back when he thought that everything was still alright and he & Mike would be happy together again. Now, everything was ruined because Will had been foolishly dishonest. It was a mistake he would regret for the rest of his life; he knew that already, and he would always know it, too. He slipped Isaac's engagement ring back on with a shaky sigh, sobbing quietly for a moment before composing himself as best as he could.

Will walked out once he was ready, seeing Mike holding his head in his hands on the couch. Will glanced toward the kitchen, seeing skillets and plates strewn all over—confirming Will's suspicions.

When he looked over at Mike, he noticed that the taller man was crying. Mike's chest was hitching, his breath rattled, and his soft weeps filling the air between them. Will wiped away a few more tears of his own, clearing his throat to announce his presence. "I'm gonna go now," Will said, hands tucked into his pockets.

"Okay," Mike said, looking up at Will and wiping his eyes. "Be safe, I guess."

"Try to," Will mumbled, walking to the front door. He paused before opening it, saying: "Two for two."

"What?" Mike asked, his voice thick with tears.

"Two strikes now for you, too," Will replied, looking over at the brunet for a moment. "You cheated twice and hurt me twice, just as I hurt you twice. Now we really are even."

As Mike opened his mouth to make another confession, Will had slammed the door and was gone.

Will found himself outside of his house an hour or so later. He would have arrived sooner, had he not spent twenty minutes crying in his car and another ten debating whether or not to face Isaac or wait until the next day when things simmered a bit. But Will figured that he just as well get it all over with in one day, so that it wouldn't weigh too heavy on his mind. Then he could also focus on where he was going to live next and what his next move would be.

Will got out of the car, locking it before stepping into the home. It felt as though he'd been gone for weeks rather than just one day, but the events of what had transpired yesterday and earlier still fresh in his mind. Will felt like he was walking through fog, and it wasn't an entirely different sensation from what he'd experienced the previous day upon arriving at Mike's. Only this time, Will knew the outcome. He knew that Mike hated him for sure now, and that only made the feeling even worse.

And then there was the fact that Isaac, his current fiancé, had slept with Mike, his ex-fiancé. That hurt worse than anything ever had—even Mike cheating the first time. That time, it had been a total stranger. This time, it had been someone Will had loved and was planning on marrying, for God’s sake.

“Isaac?” Will called when he found his voice, trying to keep his emotions at bay for the time being. “Are you here?”

“Will?” he heard Isaac reply from upstairs. “Is that you?”

“Yep!” Will called. “Come down, please. We seriously need to talk.”

“I agree,” Isaac said. “Hold on a sec, my darling. I need to get a towel; I just got out of the shower.”

Washing last night’s evidence away, most likely, Will thought bitterly. He probably doesn’t know that I know about what happened yet.

Will laid his keys on the small table next to the front door, within reach for when he decided to leave—or when Isaac kicked him out, whichever came first. Will knew that it was inevitable, that Isaac would react as Mike had and Will would lose him, too.

It was all Will’s own fault, he knew that much. Why couldn’t he have just been honest with them? It would have saved so much despair on all sides.

Isaac appeared at the top of the stairs, his bleach-blonde hair still wet from the shower, a blue towel wrapped around his waist. He didn’t appear to be mad; in fact, he seemed sad and possibly disappointed, but not angry. Not like Mike had been, at least.

Will fidgeted with his own fingers as Isaac moved down the stairs toward him, Will’s own anger beginning to shine through. Will drew his hand back for the second time that late morning, delivering a strike to Isaac’s cheek as the tall man stood in front of him. Isaac cried out, looking at Will with a mixed expression of horror and genuine shock.

“What in the hell was that for?!” Isaac exclaimed, a large hand

cradling his stinging cheek.

“You know very well that that was for!” Will yelled. “You and Mike... You both...You...slept with him, Isaac! How could you betray me like that?! What, am I not enough? Were you seriously that pissed at me that you thought the best form of revenge would be crawling into bed with my ex?! You’re despicable.”

Isaac furrowed his brows, hands on his hips as he cast a confused glance at Will. “What? Will, I honestly don’t know what you’re talking about right now. I didn’t sleep with him.”

“Don’t you dare!” Will shrieked. “Don’t you dare try to gaslight me like that! Mike told me that he slept with you last night, Isaac. He said that you two...that you and he...”

“Will,” Isaac said, his tone firm and as serious as the expression on his face. He laid his hands on Will’s upper arms, giving them a gentle squeeze. “Listen. I don’t know what he’s talking about. We didn’t sleep together, I swear to God. I would never do something like that to you. I wouldn’t even dream of it.”

Will gazed into Isaac’s eyes, his anger beginning to settle as he saw the honesty swimming in those bright blue eyes. He was telling Will the truth. Will burst into tears then, causing Isaac to take Will gently into his arms. He kissed Will’s hair, rocking him back and forth a little. “I know you lied about Mike and where you were going,” he murmured. “I know what happened between you two yesterday. I forgive you, Will. I do. I was really mad about it at first, but I had time to think and I just...You mean the world to me and so much more. I...I do have something to tell you, though. But before you freak out, know that I was drinking a little and it was a stupid mistake.”

“Okay...” Will said cautiously. “What...What happened?”

Isaac took a deep breath, grabbing both of Will’s hands and giving them a tender squeeze. “I...I kissed Mike.”

Will let go of Isaac’s hands, taking a step back. “You what?!”

"That's all that happened!" Isaac cried, holding his hands up defensively. "I swear, Will! It was foolish of me, and I regret it so much."

"You said you'd never cheat on me, like, thirty seconds ago," Will scoffed. "Now, you're saying that you did. Kissing is still cheating, you know!"

"Oh, like how you kissed Mike yesterday, right?" Isaac snarked, causing Will to wince and cast his eyes to the ground. "Sorry. That was...Look. I kissed him and he completely rejected me. He felt terrible, as did I. We both had a little bit to drink and Mike crashed here, in case he was a danger on the road. We sat up talking about you and I taught him some Welsh. That's all, I swear to God."

Will remained silent, wiping a few fresh tears from his eyes. "I want to believe you," Will told him. "But I—"

"He really loves you, Will," Isaac cut off. "I could see that in his eyes. He sincerely felt awful for cheating on you last year. He loves you beyond anything in this world, Will. He truly does. He hated himself after we kissed, and I hated myself for allowing it to happen in the first place."

Will chuckled humorlessly, more tears leaking down his cheeks. "Bullshit. He hates me now for lying to him. He kicked me out and said he never wants to see me again. So, it's over between the two of us, I suppose."

"Do you still love him?" Isaac asked.

"Yes," Will said honestly. "But he doesn't love me or, if he does, he sure as hell doesn't want me in his life anymore. Men are complicated."

Isaac laughed, kissing Will gently in comfort. "We are," he agreed, putting an arm around Will's shoulders. "Maybe give him some space? He may come around, once he's had time to cool off. But if you still love him, Will...Then it isn't over. You know that."

Will shook his head, laughing a bit. "It doesn't matter if he comes

around or not, and it doesn't matter if I still love him or not. He lied to me about you. I don't know his reasoning behind it, but he caused me a lot of unnecessary pain today. It may take me some time to be able to forgive him, if I ever do at all."

Isaac kissed Will again, beginning to lead him up the stairs. "Come," he said. "Let's go and get changed—you into some clean clothes and me into some actual ones—and we can cuddle. Maybe even order a pizza and get some ice cream, if you want? I just want you to feel better, and I know those are two of your biggest comfort foods."

"You aren't exactly off of the shit list just yet," Will said with a giggle—the first happy sound he'd made since arriving back home. "But that does sound amazing. I just...I forgive you, too, but please no more drinking around attractive strangers without supervision."

Isaac laughed loudly as he led Will toward their room, shaking his head. "Deal. Why didn't you ever tell me about Mike, though? He seems like a truly good bloke to me."

Will shrugged. "I dunno," he said with a soft smile. "I just wanted to keep my past buried in the past, I suppose. I should have told you that I was engaged before, though. That wasn't right to lie about or keep hidden from you."

"You're wearing your ring!" Isaac observed proudly, caressing the silver band around Will's finger. "I love you so much. Do you know that?"

"I love you, too," Will replied. "Now let's get dressed and order that pizza. I'm starving!"

After enjoying a lunch consisting of pepperoni pizza and strawberry ice cream, Isaac and Will had dozed off together. Will was roused about an hour into the nap by the bedroom phone ringing on his bedside table. He fumbled for it, listening to Isaac stir as Will picked up. "Hello?"

"Will?" It was El.

“Hey, El,” Will said sleepily. “Is everything okay?”

“No,” El replied with a sigh. “It’s Mike, Will. He isn’t...He’s not well.”

“What do you mean?” Will asked worriedly, sitting up in bed as his heart began to pound against his ribcage.

“He feels really terrible about earlier,” El replied. “He filled me in on what happened. “He’s not...He isn’t taking it well at all. He is so upset and regretful, and I am seriously really worried about him.”

“He lied to me,” Will said bitterly. “He told me he slept with Isaac and he didn’t. Also, he’s the one who kicked me out. So, it’s his problem, honestly, not mine. I’m done.”

“Will—“ El began.

“No, Eleven,” Will said firmly, his use of her full name signaling that he was done discussing the matter. “I’m back with Isaac, and that is where I’m gonna stay.”

“Will, please talk to him at least?” El begged. “I’m here with him now. I can put him on.”

“Of course,” Will said annoyingly. “He always did love you the most when we were kids. You two will make a good couple. Just don’t let him hurt you like he hurt me. Or throw things at you and push you onto the floor.”

“He did that?!” El asked, shock bleeding into her voice.

“Yep,” Will said. “Enjoy him, El. You have my blessing.”

“We are just friends,” she retorted. “I could never do something like that to you. Not in a million years, Will. You are my brother, my family, and I know that you two still love each other. I could never hurt you like that, because I know how badly it would hurt you. I don’t want that.”

“Whatever,” Will said as he rolled his eyes. “Do whatever you want, I don’t care. I gotta go.”

“Will, come on—“ El started.

“I love you, sis,” Will said as he took the receiver from his ear. “I’ll see you at Christmas.”

Before he could hear what else his sister had to say, Will had hung up. He laid back in bed, rolling over and folding himself against Isaac. The taller man grasped Will tightly in his sleep, sighing happily in his dreams. Will plunged back into the depths of slumber, where dreams of what his future may hold played behind closed eyelids. All of it starred the one and only Mike Wheeler, and when Will woke later, he knew what he had to do.

He was going to get married—perhaps sooner rather than later.

6. Epilogue

Summary for the Chapter:

So this is the final chapter of Whiskey and Broken Hearts! Thank you to everyone who read and enjoyed it, it means the absolute world!

As it turned out, there was a wedding being planned after all.

Will had made the final decision to marry Isaac, and it was a fairly simple, easy one to make. Will's life had just made more sense with the charming Welsh doctor, and he was just happier overall with him. There was just something about Isaac that calmed him the way nothing else could, and Will just couldn't let that go. He wanted to spend every single moment for the rest of his life with him, and wanted to spend an eternity finally being happy with someone who wasn't Mike Wheeler.

Will had stopped speaking to Mike again, after leaving him for the second time. Will had shut down almost completely and refused to speak or listen when El or their friends brought him up. Mike was seeing an incredible woman named Allison, Lucas had told Will about four months after Will had left Mike for the second time. Good for him, Will thought, but there was no absence of jealousy and hurt when he thought about Mike with someone else, possibly much happier than he'd been with Will. Will had probably more or less faded completely from Mike's memory by now, and the joy that they'd experienced together was being replaced by Allison. Of course that hurt; it hurt a lot.

A year went by. Mike, too, was getting married, El announced to Will in the middle of the street one dreary April afternoon. She'd also shared that Allison was pregnant. Will only silently walked away when he heard the news, the spring rain that fell concealing his tears in the crowded city street. He and Isaac were two weeks from getting married at that point, but Will wanted to get married right away. Mike was happy with someone else now and he was going to be a father; there was no longer any room for Will, if there even had been any more to begin with. Will only felt a deep sorrow and even deeper

regret that rocked him to his very core, and it sunk him into a deep depression for a few days.

Will hated himself for being so selfish, but he hated himself even more for still loving Mike Wheeler.

Will blamed himself a week later, when El had told him that Allison had suffered a miscarriage. Will felt that it was somehow his fault, that his self-serving desire for Mike had somehow been the cause of it. Mike was devastated, and told El that he wanted—no, needed—his best friend: Will. When Will refused, Mike's contact with El ceased for awhile. Allison and Mike split three days before Will & Isaac's wedding, and Will began to feel that false sense of hope beginning to embed in his heart for what seemed to be the millionth time. Will made up an excuse about June being too hot for a wedding and asked Isaac if they could push it to November instead. Isaac had reluctantly agreed.

Everything started going well again for Will after that, however. Not hearing anymore news about Mike had put a spring back into his step, and he found himself smiling more often. For awhile, Will was truly happy. He felt as though he really could marry Isaac for love and not just because Isaac made him feel better. Then one balmy summer night Will's stepfather, Jim Hopper, sat him down for a nice little chat on the "Mike situation," as El was fond of referring to it.

"Will," Hopper said as they each sipped on a beer on the Byers' front porch. "Do you know why I asked you to come out here with me?"

"No," Will said honestly. "Is everything alright? With you? With Mom?"

Hopper nodded, a small smile on his lips. "Everything is just fine with us, both individually and in our marriage. I actually wanted to talk to you about Mike."

Will's heart snapped and that familiar pain was slowly beginning to creep back. "Oh," he said softly. "I don't want to talk about—"

"Well, we are," Hopper said sternly, crushing his now-empty beer can in his hand and tossing it into the wastebasket that Joyce had set out

there for them. “So, you’re going to shush up and let me speak. Understand?”

Will nodded, knowing better than to disobey the man he’d always viewed as his real father. Hopper always had a way of making Will listen, and now was definitely no exception. “He’s still in so much pain, son,” Hopper explained. “From losing you, and Allison, and the baby. He misses you so much. He’s still so damn in love with you, Will. Do you want to know how I know that?”

“Not really,” Will mumbled.

“I still talk to him,” Hopper said. “Last year, when I told him that you and Isaac were getting married, he just...something inside of him died. He started dating Allison the very next day. He didn’t love her like he loves you, Will. He may have in his own way, but he only wanted to get over you. Like how you’re using Isaac to get over Mike. Do you see what I’m saying?”

Will stayed quiet, so Hopper answered for him. “You both love each other so much and you belong together. You’re both too stubborn and prideful to admit it, but you’re going to have to. What do you want, Will? A lifetime of misery and regret married to a man that you don’t fully love? Or a lifetime of happiness and smiles with someone you DO love unconditionally? Is your pride really more important than your overall happiness?”

Will shrugged, his mouth dry and his head swimming—and not from the beer he was drinking. It was swimming with everything Hopper had just told him, and Will found himself not able to think clearly. Still, he said: “I...I don’t know. He messed up really badly, Dad. I—“

“We all fuck up occasionally,” Hopper told him, clapping him gently on the back. “Even royally, but that doesn’t always mean that we don’t care or love someone. Sometimes we do it because we think we’re doing the right thing, but we’re too stupid to realize how we could also be hurting the other person. Much like you and Mike did to each other the second time around.”

Will sighed, looking at Hopper with sad eyes. “He’ll never forgive me. Not for the lies or walking out or hurting him. He—“

“He’s forgiven you,” Hopper interjected, his tone firm and serious. “He told me so himself.”

Will’s head snapped up, his eyes wide with shock. “What?” he asked, voice barely audible as the single word fell past his parched lips.

“Talk to him,” Hopper pleaded. “Actually talk, no yelling or accusing or being stubborn. Communicate.”

It took Will another three months before finding the courage to do just that. But he and Mike had always shared a special, almost psychic, connection, and Will didn’t have to call or ask any of his friends or family to pass on the message to Mike that he was ready to talk. Two days before Will’s wedding, Will had gotten a surprise at his front door, one that made him go weak in the knees from both shock and overall joy.

For once, in the total two-and-a-half years since Will had first walked out on him, Mike had finally come to him.

Will had no idea how long they stood in the doorway, awkwardly and silently, before Will let him in. Isaac was out with friends, something that Will was thankful for at the moment. He had wanted to see Mike for the longest time, and the more honest Will could be with his former fiancé without worry of eavesdropping, the better.

“Listen—“ they said simultaneously. “I have to—“

They both stopped, chuckling slightly before Mike waved for Will to continue. “You go first,” Mike insisted.

Will smiled softly, gesturing for Mike to sit at the kitchen table—the very same one that Mike had once sat when discussing Will with Isaac. That entire exchange seemed as though it had taken place an eternity ago. “I don’t even know where to start,” Will began. “I guess saying ‘I’m sorry’ is a great starting point.”

“Yeah,” Mike said, looking down for a moment and rubbing the back of his neck. “It’s...It’s a start, for sure.”

“I was out of line for what I did to you,” Will continued. “Leaving

you, lying about being engaged and hiding that from you, walking out, and ignoring you. It was...I should have never—“

“I’m gonna stop you for a second,” Mike said, shifting a bit in his chair and holding his hand up in a ‘stop’ motion. “Because, besides hiding your engagement, you have nothing to be sorry about. I cheated on you and that was completely inexcusable. There’s no excuse to justify that, and I’m sorry that I ever tried to make any for it. You leaving me for that is something that any self-respecting person would have done.

“Then I lied to you about Isaac. I said we slept together when we didn’t. That’s another thing I can’t excuse. I was just so damn hurt and angry that you kept such a big secret from me. I wanted to get back at you, I wanted you to hurt as much as I did, but it only made things so much worse. It isn’t an excuse and I’m not trying to pass it off as one. It’s just the truth, and that’s what I want from both of us right now. Honesty and openness.”

Will nodded slowly, eyes cast to the ground before meeting Mike’s gaze. “You hurt me so much,” Will stated, a single tear falling down his cheek. “So much. I went through so much hell because of you. I spent so many nights crying myself to sleep or not sleeping at all because of how much I missed you. Because of how badly you had hurt me and how deep that pain really went. After all the bullshit you put me through, after all the misery and the tears I shed over you, I still loved and missed you. Even when I hated you or wanted to hate you, I still loved you with everything in me. I always will love you, Michael Wheeler. Nothing will ever change that. I...I’m sorry that I hurt you. I’m sorry that I ignored you. I...”

“Shh...” Mike soothed, reaching over the table to wipe the tear from Will’s cheek. “I’ve already forgiven you, a long time ago. I love you, Will. I love you so very much. I—“

But Mike was cut off as Will practically leaps across the table to close the space between them, Will’s lips pressing to Mike’s immediately. It was a soft kiss, gentle and tame, and Mike could feel the love radiating from just that one touch of their lips. He cupped Will’s face, prolonging the kiss, not wanting it to ever end. Will’s lips felt like coming home after being away for so long, and it was a feeling that

Mike had missed so terribly. All the years they knew each other, all the moments they'd shared with together, played behind Mike's closed eyelids. He clung to Will, afraid that when he opened his eyes he'd be kissing someone else. He was terrified that he would be kissing a total stranger like he had done so many times before after Will left him, and he was only imagining that Will was here.

Thankfully, that wasn't the case. When they pulled back, Will was still in front of him, grinning and even crying a bit. Mike couldn't help but notice how beautiful he was, even now and even while crying. Will's natural beauty was only one of many things that never ceased to amaze him about the smaller man; Will was a work of art, more gorgeous and ethereal than any creation Will could create himself. Maybe that's why he always loved drawing and creating other artwork so much, Mike thought. Because he subconsciously wanted to create a rival for himself, to see if people still saw him as the pure masterpiece that he truly is.

"Don't cry," Mike said gently, once his thoughts broke. "Will, I love you."

"I know," Will said, wiping away more of his tears with a grin. "I'm crying because I'm so happy and...because I'm supposed to be getting married in a couple of days. So I'm both really happy and also a little sad, because...because..."

Mike sat back as Will trailed off, his heart completely shattering as Mike stood from the table. "A-Ah," he breathed. "I...I didn't know... I'm sorry. I thought it had been put off for awhile? El told me that it had been put off for a few months."

"It was," Will said, standing to join Mike. He reached down to take his hand, squeezing before leaning up to press a delicate kiss at the corner of Mike's mouth. "But I...I don't want to marry Isaac anymore."

Mike's ears perked a bit and he glanced down at Will in surprise. "What?" he asked softly. "Will, if this is some kind of sick joke—"

"It isn't," Will said truthfully. "We're being honest with each other, remember?"

“Yes,” Mike stated. “You...You really do mean it?”

“Every word.”

“I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“For coming between you and Isaac.”

“You didn’t,” Will whispered, kissing Mike’s cheek and swinging their hands a bit. “I do love him, but nowhere near as much as I love you. Hopper talked to me about you and this situation we’re all in, and I realized something. I was only using Isaac to get over you.”

“I used so many people to try and get over you,” Mike replied. “So, I know what you mean. I used Allison, then she got pregnant, then she lost the baby. You wanna know something?”

“What?” Will asked curiously.

“The baby wasn’t mine,” Mike said, a humorless chuckle falling past his lips as Will looked at him with horrified surprise. “Yeah. Allison told me that she got drunk one night while I was away and slept with her ex, and the baby was HIS. That’s why we broke up. I guess karma dealt me the exact same card, but you know what else? I didn’t miss her, at all. I missed you, so damn much. I needed you because I wanted you back so badly. I just...”

“Mike,” Will said tenderly. “I get it, and I’m really sorry. But you’re here now, and we have another chance at this. Let’s talk to Isaac together and let him down as gently as possible. Okay?”

“Yeah,” Mike said, feeling stronger and more full of life than he had in years, kissing Will’s cheek before taking him by the waist. “Together.”

When Isaac came home later that night, Will and Mike explained to him how they wanted to reconcile and give their romance another try. They apologized for it being so sudden and so soon before the wedding but Isaac understood and said that it was long overdue. Despite being heartbroken, Isaac had even given them his blessing.

Will moved out of the home he shared with Isaac on the very same day he was supposed to marry him. He and Mike moved back into their old apartment they once shared and Mike had re-proposed during a vacation to Paris. They married a year after that in a beautiful beach-side ceremony. Mike had made so many changes in his life to be the better man that Will deserved, and there was one particular change that he was determined to uphold for the rest of his life. He never, ever, wanted to repeat his past mistakes or risk making them again.

And so Mike Wheeler hadn't touched a single drop of alcohol from the moment they reconciled, and he never would again. Til death would they part, there would be no more whiskey and broken hearts between them.